

American Working Teens Fact Sheet

National Consumers League
September 2003

Who's Working?

70-80 percent of teens have worked for pay at some time during their high school years.ⁱ

Fifty percent of employed youth work more than 15 hours during a school week. One in six work more than 25 hours during a school week.ⁱⁱ

As many as 800,000 youth between the ages of 5 and 18 are working as migrant and seasonal farmworkers.ⁱⁱⁱ

148,000 youth are *illegally* employed in an average week in the United States.^{iv}

The Dangers of Youth Employment

Every 30 seconds, a young worker under the age of 18 is injured in the workplace. One teen dies due to workplace injury on average every five days.^v

Fatalities among working youth under age 18 have remained consistent with an average of 67 deaths per year (1992-2000)

Injuries to working youth have increased. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) estimated that working teens experienced 200,000 injuries in 1992. This number rose to 230,000 injuries in 1998.

Adolescents treated in hospital emergency rooms for work-related injuries have increased. In 1992, NIOSH estimated 64,000 emergency room visits. That number climbed to 77,000 in 1998.

Protecting Our Teen Workers: A Law in Need of Modernization

The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) of 1938 was designed to protect the educational opportunities of minors and prohibit their employment in jobs and under conditions detrimental to their health or well-being. There has never been a comprehensive review of the child labor provisions of the FLSA since its enactment in 1938. Only piecemeal revisions and updates have occurred.

Currently under the FLSA:

TEN-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN may be *legally* employed as migrant and seasonal farmworkers, harvesting our nation's fruits and vegetables.

Youth 16 and older who are in school may work up to 40 hours a week during the school year, with unlimited hours per day and late night hours.

There is only limited protection for youth from dangers in construction, driving/operating machinery, and agriculture. High incidents of injuries and deaths among working minors occur in these areas.

ⁱ Light 1995; Steinberg and Cauffman 1995.

ⁱⁱ *Beyond the Classroom* by Laurence Steinberg, 1996.

ⁱⁱⁱ United Farm Workers estimate.

^{iv} "Illegal Child Labor in the United States: Prevalence & Characteristics," by Doug Kruse, Rutgers University, 1998.

^v National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) estimates that 230,000 workers under the age of 18 are injured on the job each year and between 60-70 youth workers die due to workplace injury.